

## Transparency in IARC Monographs

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In May, 2003, *The Lancet Oncology* suggested that the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) adopt a general policy of greater transparency, and specifically called for the names of members of the working group to be published before every Monograph meeting.<sup>1</sup> Until then, IARC withheld the names of members of the working group because of concern that attempts could be made to influence them before a meeting. Nevertheless, both sides of the issue have good arguments.

To gather a broad sense of opinion of the scientists directly affected, IARC asked more than 200 participants from the previous 5 years of Monograph meetings whether they favoured advance disclosure of participants' names. Most respondents supported this move, citing the importance of increased openness. More enlightening than the proportion in favour though, were the comments that many added to their responses. These comments showed a convergence of thought between those of different opinions. Many who preferred disclosure of the names advised that IARC take steps to prevent lobbying. Many who favoured no disclosure of the names warned that although openness is important, IARC should not make lobbying easier. Some respondents reported that participants' names do become known, and that interested parties had indeed contacted them before a meeting.

These comments convinced IARC that a broad consensus regards both transparency and freedom from interference as important, and that action is needed to prevent lobbying. As a result, IARC has formalised

and published<sup>2,3</sup> procedures that keep to a minimum the possibility that special interests might endeavour to influence a Monograph meeting. Prospective participants declare conflicting interests<sup>4</sup> before IARC selects a working group, and these interests are disclosed at the meeting and in the published Monograph. Experts with conflicting interests have restrictions placed on their participation and are called invited specialists<sup>2</sup> to clarify this interest.

To increase transparency further, IARC has started to make participants' names and affiliations available on its website about 2 months before every meeting. To discourage lobbying, the notice: "IARC requests that you do not contact or lobby meeting participants, send them written materials, or offer favours that could appear to be linked to their participation . . . IARC will ask participants to report all such contacts and will publicly reveal any attempt to influence the meeting" appears above the names. During a meeting, IARC reminds participants to report, in private, any such activity. On the basis of experience over the past 12 months, it seems that these actions increase transparency and maintain an environment that is free from interference.

Starting with the October, 2005, Monograph meeting on polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, IARC and *The Lancet Oncology* have agreed to take further steps to increase transparency. Members of the working group will be credited collectively as contributors to every *Policy Watch*, and as contributors will be asked to complete *The Lancet Oncology's* statement of conflict of interest. *The Lancet Oncology* will summarise these statements for

the *Policy Watch* that is published 4–8 weeks after a Monograph meeting. In this way, information about pertinent interests will be available alongside the working group's conclusions. Importantly, IARC retains complete discretion over participation in its meetings and continues to use WHO's declaration of interests<sup>4</sup> to identify conflicting interests. Accordingly, comments about participants or conflicting interests should be addressed to IARC.

IARC is continually seeking ways to preserve the integrity of all its programmes and is mindful of the worldwide reliance on IARC Monograph assessments for unbiased information about the causes of human cancer. We agree with *The Lancet* that: "It only needs the perception, let alone the reality, of financial conflicts and commercial pressures to destroy the credibility of important organisations such as IARC and its parent, WHO".<sup>5</sup> We hope that the actions we have taken, including the steps we are announcing here, serve to maintain and enhance public confidence in the work of the 1000 scientists from 50 countries, who since 1971 have participated in developing the IARC Monographs.

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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1. Burton A. Will IARC election help to change "name security" policy? *Lancet Oncol* 2003; 4: 262.
2. Coglianò VJ, Baan RA, Straif K, et al. The science and practice of carcinogen identification and evaluation. *Environ Health Perspect* 2004; 112: 1269–74.
3. IARC. Guidelines for observers at IARC Monograph meetings. <http://monographs.iarc.fr> (accessed Aug 31, 2005)
4. WHO. Declaration of interests for WHO experts. <http://monographs.iarc.fr> (accessed Aug 31, 2005)
5. Editorial. Transparency at IARC. *Lancet* 2003; 361: 189.



See Reflection and Reaction  
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IARC Monograph programme  
<http://monographs.iarc.fr/>

### Upcoming meetings

Oct 11–18, 2005  
Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons  
Feb 7–14, 2006  
Carbon black, titanium dioxide,  
non-asbestosiform talc